

# THE PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

## “Guidelines for Congregations Considering A Request to Presbytery to be Dismissed”

### PREAMBLE

The Presbytery of Western North Carolina of the Presbyterian Church (USA) proclaims its enduring belief in the unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ, of which it is a grateful part. The members of the PCUSA are united by obedience to the Lord Jesus, who alone is head of the Church, by fidelity to the teachings of Scripture, and by adherence to the denomination’s Constitution, which enshrines such vital affirmations as:

- *“The unity of the Church is a gift of its Lord and finds expression in its faithfulness to the mission to which Christ calls it.” (BO: G-4.0201)*
- *“The particular churches of the Presbyterian Church (USA), wherever they are, taken collectively, constitute one church.” (BO: G-4.0301.a)*
- *“All property held by or for a particular church, a presbytery, a synod, the General Assembly ... is held in trust nevertheless for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (USA).” (BO:G-8.0201)*

When this unity that is our Lord’s gift appears to be in jeopardy within one of its Congregations, the Presbytery must determine, in the light of the wider mission of Christ’s Church, what is best and most faithful for all its members and resources.

**The goal of this Presbytery will always be reconciliation and continued relationship with all its Congregations.**

The following process outlines the steps this Presbytery will reluctantly use to respond to situations where a Congregation, or its leaders, contemplate no longer maintaining their ordination vow to *“be governed by our church’s polity, and ... abide by its discipline.” (BO: W-4.4003.e)*

- I. The Congregation shall consider the Biblical imperatives in these passages:  
Peace Romans 14:19; Galatians 5:22; Colossians 3:15  
Unity John 17:21; I Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:1-3  
Purity I Corinthians 5:9-13; Hebrews 12:14; James 4:8
- II. Individual members, including officers (deacons, elders and ministers) may, at any time, unite with other Reformed denominations following provisions in the *Book of Order* (BO: G-10.0102)
- III. Congregations may be dismissed by Presbytery only to a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches or to another Reformed denomination recognized by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly (PCUSA).
- IV. Congregations considering a request to be so dismissed, shall follow these steps:
  - A. The Session shall meet with representatives from the Committee on Ministry. (BO: G-11.0500)
    1. At this meeting, the Session shall give the COM representatives a written statement of their reasons for considering leaving the PCUSA.
    2. The Session shall also deliver to the COM representatives a current membership directory (including addresses and telephone numbers) of the Congregation.
    3. The Session shall, at this meeting, recognize the right of the Presbytery to communicate directly, at any time by various means, with members of the Congregation.
    4. The Session shall agree to hold no meetings of the Congregation to consider leaving the PCUSA (other than those specified later in these Guidelines) without the permission and involvement of Presbytery.
  - B. If the Session determines to proceed, it shall request the Presbytery to call a hearing of the Congregation, and to establish the rules for that hearing. Due notice shall be given orally from the pulpit at regular church services on two successive Sundays, the first of which shall be at least ten days prior to the hearing. Prior notice shall also be given in the parish newsletter or bulletin.
    1. At least 33% of the active members of the Congregation shall be present.
    2. Representatives appointed by Presbytery (the Committee on Ministry (COM) and Presbytery staff acting on its behalf) shall be present throughout and shall have the right to speak.
    3. The question\* to be discussed is “Shall the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church request dismissal to another Reformed body?”
    4. Ample time shall be provided for both speakers wanting dismissal and those wanting to stay with the PCUSA.
    5. No type of vote for any purpose shall be taken at this hearing.
  - C. If the Session is still determined to proceed, it shall --- no sooner than three months and no later than six months after the first hearing described above --- request the Presbytery to call a second hearing of the Congregation, and to establish the rules for that hearing.
    1. Due notice shall be mailed to all members of the Congregation at least thirty (30) days prior to the hearing, and shall be given orally from the pulpit at regular church services on two successive Sundays, the first of which shall be at least ten days prior to the hearing.
    2. The Clerk of Session and the Stated Clerk of Presbytery shall agree on the roster of active members, and the procedure for their registration at this hearing. Due diligence shall be exercised to ensure that only those eligible to vote do so.
    3. At least 50% of the active members shall be present.
    4. Representatives appointed by Presbytery (COM and staff acting on its behalf)

shall be present throughout and shall have the right to speak.

5. The question\* to be discussed is “Shall the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church request Presbytery to dismiss it to this Reformed body: \_\_\_\_\_?”
  6. Ample time shall be provided for both speakers wanting dismissal and those wanting to stay with the PCUSA.
  7. After discussion and prayer, a secret written ballot shall be taken on this question, the only choices being “Request dismissal” or “Do Not request dismissal.”
  8. If 75% of those active members present and voting vote to request dismissal, the request shall go to Presbytery.
  9. If any five members, present and voting, contest the regularity (the call for, the conduct of or the vote taken) of the second Congregational hearing, they shall send the details of their allegation, postmarked within ten business days of that meeting, to the Stated Clerk of Presbytery, who shall convene the Permanent Judicial Commission to render a decision.
- D. At the meeting of Presbytery to consider a request for dismissal, the Presbytery shall:
1. Hear from representatives from the Congregation in favor of dismissal;
  2. Hear from representatives of those wishing to remain in the PCUSA, reserving to Presbytery the right to determine “the true church” (*BO: G-8.0600*)
  3. Hear from the representatives appointed by Presbytery (COM and staff) who were present at the second Congregational hearing, and who may also recommend a decision to Presbytery;
  4. Be informed of any financial contributions from this Congregation to the Presbytery, Synod or General Assembly and to this Congregation by the Presbytery, Synod or General Assembly within at least the last ten years.
  5. Be informed what provisions will be made for those members who wish to remain in the PCUSA and for any Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Christian Educators or Commissioned Lay Pastors associated with the Congregation;
  6. Be informed how the Congregation’s dismissal would affect the mission and ministry of the Church in this Presbytery.
  7. After discussion and prayer, the Presbytery shall vote by written ballot on this question,\* ‘Shall the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church be dismissed to this Reformed body: \_\_\_\_\_?,” the only choices being “Yes” or “No.”
  8. If two-thirds of those commissioners present and voting vote in favor of dismissal, that shall be the action of Presbytery.
  9. If the Congregation (or any part of it) is dismissed, it may not use the prior name of the Congregation.
- E. If the Presbytery approved dismissing a Congregation to another Reformed body, that Congregation may also petition Presbytery to dismiss it with all or some of its property. If so requested, Presbytery shall (at the next Presbytery meeting):
1. Hear from representatives from the Congregation in favor of the petition;
  2. Receive a recommended decision (which can be debated and amended) from a task force (that shall include some with financial expertise)-- appointed by the chairs of the Coordinating Council and the Committee on Ministry and the General Presbyter -- which has met with representatives of the Congregation, detailing appropriate financial terms in the light of the needs of the Congregation, those wishing to continue in the PCUSA, and the overall mission of Presbytery. The task force shall obtain a competent appraisal of the property, the cost of which shall be shared by the Presbytery and the Session. Sometime prior to this Presbytery meeting, a representative of the task force shall inform the Session of the Congregation in question of the terms of the recommendation.
  3. After discussion and prayer, the Presbytery shall vote by written ballot on this question:\* “Shall the \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church which has been

dismissed to this Reformed body: \_\_\_\_\_, be granted these financial arrangements for its property:\_\_\_\_\_.” The only choices shall be “Yes” or “No.”

4. If a majority of those present and voting vote in favor, the Congregation shall be dismissed with the approved financial arrangements for its property, provided that if the Congregation is not still a member of the specified or another Reformed body at any time within ten years, the dismissed property shall revert back to Presbytery.
- V. The intent in any dispute within the life of a Congregation is to achieve reconciliation in the Lord. It is therefore the clear intention of this Presbytery to continue to pursue that goal, and to assure any departing members of a Congregation of its continuing prayers for them and its willingness to welcome them back, at any time, to that part of God’s family known as the Presbyterian Church (USA).

\*As circumstances warrant, the Presbytery, in consultation with the Session, may modify the exact wording of these questions.

Approved January 31, 2009